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ABSTRACT

A survey of teachers' perceptions of student competencies, course content, instructional methods, and evaluation procedures was conducted to determine if previously reported conclusions about secondary school speech curricula had changed and if there were differences between the curricula in large and small high schools. The survey instrument was prepared with 40 competency objectives appropriate for grades 9 through 12 and mailed to 150 secondary schools in 14 states. Analysis of responses received from 15 small and 17 large schools revealed little difference from previous findings. The results showed that: (1) for all schools, most competencies were developed in introductory rather than advanced courses, or not developed at all; (2) for all schools, the top 10 competencies were related to public speaking; (3) on almost half of the competencies, large and small schools differed on the favored way of developing the competency, with the overall favored method being performance activity; and (4) for all schools, the performance grade was the most frequently used evaluative method. (FL)

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AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY, CONTENT, AND
METHODOLOGY REPORTED IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
IN THE UNITED STATES

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**An Analysis of Communication Competency, Content, and Methodology
Reported in Secondary Schools in the United States**

ABSTRACT

A survey of randomly selected secondary schools in the United States obtained data related to four questions regarding the nature of communication competency, content, and methodology as they exist in secondary schools. The results show overall little difference from previous findings by Book and Pappas but do reveal that there are substantial differences between large and small schools. Results suggest that communication education scholars still have a challenge in the impact on secondary school teaching in the United States.

AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY, CONTENT, AND METHODOLOGY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES

One of the continual concerns for those interested in communication education is the status and nature of instruction. Studies abound which seek to discover what is happening to programs in secondary schools most often labeled speech. Studies have been made to determine such things as if programs exist, if programs are growing, if teachers are prepared, if programs are funded.¹ Studies have been made to compare results over time. The most recent study by Pappas and Book suggests that, over time, little has changed in the curricular content of secondary school speech programs.²

Clearly, we now know that programs exist, with emphasis on skill development, a concentration on public speaking skills, and some kind of recent interest concepts.³ Thusfar, research has tended to ask questions about categories of content without any kind of concern for the concept of competency development or for the notion of magnitude of emphasis. It would seem more productive to know what specific competencies teachers assume their students will develop during a course. It may be argued that a perception of a desired outcome, even if it might not be stated in a syllabus or curriculum guide, may be more informative about the content of a course than a listing of categories of instruction (i.e., listening, delivery skills, informative speaking, discussion). Further, it may be argued that a perception of importance of a competency and a perception of comparative importance of competencies will be more useful to an understanding of instruction in secondary school speech programs than simply an identification of what categories are included. Therefore, the following reports the results of a study, although small in size, which was national in scope to obtain information which may suggest more about the quality of instruction than has been done thusfar.

Thusfar, most research has not made a serious effort to recognize the potential differences in instruction by school size. The Ince study of 1967, did make a breakdown of data by four categories of school size.⁴ However, the breakdown was not generally reflected in reporting of results. Recent research into methodology for gaining information about communication competency generally has suggested that a variable, like community size, is far more important than several other variables (i.e., sex, nature of employment).⁵ Therefore, it should be informative to examine perception of communication competency expectation and relative importance in light of the school size variable. Such information will better address the concerns for what is happening in the secondary school oral communication classroom.

The research reported in this paper was designed to address two research questions. The first research question was: Are the general conclusions about secondary school speech curricula supported by examination of specific dimensions of competency content of curricula, instructional methods, and evaluative methods?

The second research question was: Are there fundamental differences in content, method, and evaluation between speech courses in small high schools and speech courses in large high schools?

PROCEDURES

In order to understand actual content of courses, a survey instrument was prepared with 40 competency objectives drawn by stratified random procedure from a list of communication competencies containing 120 items for grades 9-12. The larger list was compiled by a joint task force of Illinois Speech and Theatre Association and Illinois Office of Education using competency materials from the Speech Communication Association. In order to gather data for answering the two research questions, respondents were asked to reply to four questions regarding each of the 40 items. In

order to determine where a competency was developed in the school curricula, respondents were asked "where the competency receives attention." In order to identify preferred instructional strategy, respondents were asked "to identify the PRIMARY instructional method by which the competency is developed." In order to identify preferred evaluation method, respondents were asked to "identify the PRIMARY way in which you evaluate how well the competency is developed." Respondents were asked to give the enrollment of their school so that data could be coded as either large school or small school, with 750 enrollment as the division point.

Surveys were mailed with postage paid return envelopes to 150 secondary schools in 14 states. Recipients were drawn randomly from federal education register lists of schools such that 10 schools were drawn from each of 13 states and 20 schools from Illinois. Mailings were addressed to "Speech Teacher" or to "Principal" with a cover letter asking that the questionnaire be given to the "appropriate teacher." Replies were received from 35 schools in 8 states. Responses were from 15 small schools and 17 from large schools. Three responses were unusable since they indicated a program did not exist. Therefore, 32 responses were used in this study. Data were coded and submitted to SPSS computation of descriptive statistics. For questions 1, 3, 4, frequencies of choices were provided. For question 2, means were provided. Means were rank ordered for the total and according to school size for comparison. The 40 competency items are listed below.

In order to identify preferred evaluation method, respondents were asked "to identify the PRIMARY way in which you evaluate how well the competency is developed.

1. Develop a valued sense of self.
2. Describe own communication strengths and weaknesses.
3. Adjust to new ideas from others.

4. Communicate effectively in an employment interview.
5. Describe the impact of power and status on communication.
6. State goals for a group.
7. Help establish operational procedures in a group.
8. Critically evaluate group decisions.
9. Identify audience characteristics.
10. Use notes and scripts effectively when speaking/reading.
11. State ideas clearly to an audience.
12. Identify how media affect individuals and groups in society.
13. Listen to and judge opposing arguments.
14. Distinguish among observation, inference, and judgment.
15. Expand or limit topics to meet needs.
16. Use evidence and supporting materials effectively.
17. Adapt topics to differing audiences.
18. Use imagination to create a reality in an artistic sense.
19. Focus listening in a variety of settings.
20. Describe varying purpose being met by specific messages.
21. Present a sequence and strategy for questioning.
22. Use information to produce a plan of action.
23. Use a variety of information sources.
24. Develop and use a research notation system which accurately reflects ideas and details.
25. Identify the main ideas of a variety of messages.
26. Identify organizational patterns (parallel form, cause-effect, chronological, effect-cause, spatial, topical, comparison, contrast, problem-solution, inductive, deductive).

27. Follow a theme from its introduction through to its conclusion.
28. Describe how language affects perception of messages.
29. Appropriately adapt language to an audience.
30. Describe and evaluate own language usage.
31. Speak clearly and audibly.
32. Maintain eye contact.
33. Function well in various performance formats.
34. Seek and utilize feedback.
35. Describe the consequences of the choice of main points in a message.
36. Describe the effects of own communication.
37. Judge messages in terms of aesthetic appeal, topicality, significance.
38. Describe and use methods for critical analyses of messages.
39. State differences among intent content, and effect.
40. Develop own concept of ethical communication and compare with concepts of others.

RESULTS

The result of analysis of data for the first question is that most competencies are to be developed in Introductory rather than Advanced courses or not developed at all. For all schools, 34 competencies are viewed appropriate for an Introductory course (See Table I). Only 3 are viewed appropriate for Advanced courses. All three clearly call for high cognitive processes. Three viewed the competency not appropriate at all. All three call for complex critical evaluative or synthesis level behaviors.

Substantial differences exist between large and small school views of

appropriate location for development of competency items. Table 1 data shows the following: 1) large and small schools differ on 17 of the 40 items; 2) on all items small schools prefer Introductory (38) or none (2); on 11 items large schools prefer Advanced; 3) of 8 items where there are differences by school size, large schools indicate multiple responses where small schools indicate single responses. The data suggests definite differences according to school size regarding the appropriate location for primary emphasis on competency development.

The result of analysis of data for the second question is shown in Table 2 as rank ordering of the importance of items. For all schools, the top ten items in rank order are 11, 32, 31, 23, 16, 10, 33, 17, 15, 26. All are essentially public speaking competency objectives.

In the matter of importance of competencies, there are very few differences between large and small school categories. Eight public speaking items appear in the top ten list for both size categories. The school size categories differ only on the two non-public speaking items included in the top ten rank ordering.

The result of analysis of data for the third question is that on almost one half (19 of 40) of the competency items, large and small schools differ on the favored method for development of the competency (see Table 3). The overall favored method is by performance activity. Further analysis indicates that of the 19 items on which school size categories are different, 9 have large schools utilizing multiple methods and small schools utilizing single methods. On 5 items the reverse is true (i.e., small schools use multiple methods while large schools use multiple methods).

The result of analysis of data for the fourth question reveal two things: performance grade is the most frequently used evaluative method; and there are substantial differences between size categories in terms of single or multiple evaluation methods (see Table 4). There are differences on 22 competency items. For 15

items both categories of school size use Performance Grade as primary evaluation. Of 22 items where the evaluation was different by school size, the difference is as follows: 11 items where both sizes used multiple method but the methods were different; 7 items where large schools used multiple methods and small schools used single methods; 3 items where both sizes used a single method but the method differed; 1 item where the small schools used multiple methods and the large schools used a single method.

DISCUSSION

Data suggests differences in curricular location of competency development according to school size. Whatever the reason, large schools consider it appropriate to spend time developing some of the competencies in advanced as well as introductory courses. This fact raises the question, "are there different perceptions of what constitutes a satisfactory level of behavior in order to constitute achievement of a particular competency?" The fact of different perceptions according to school size is not without implications. In spite of the tendency of television and other media to standardize the forms of personal communication in the United States, there are still different perceptions of acceptability. The results of this piece of research combined with research which identified differences in general public perceptions of communication competencies needed for life which showed community size as the key variable raises interesting questions.

The data on relative importance of competencies tends to confirm all the recent findings about curriculum in the secondary schools. Eight of the top ten competencies are public speaking oriented. As Pappas and Book have noted earlier, little has changed. This study which looked more closely at specific competency importance as a research method supports the earlier findings which used more general methods.

Confirmation is not without significance. Some communication scholars have suggested that it is more important to study process than skill development. Clearly that message has gone generally unheeded at the secondary level. If there is merit to the argument that study of general communication process ought to be the focus of secondary speech communication education, then the argument has not been made well or it has not been promoted through appropriate channels. If Deems Brooks was correct in his general instructional model, then perhaps the state of the discipline vis-a-vis secondary schools is not so far off an appropriate target. Brooks suggests that at the secondary level, skill development was more appropriate than theory or research.

One of three possible conclusions is to be drawn: 1) speech communication scholars have been mistaken to promote the notion that understanding of communication process is important at the secondary level; 2) speech communication scholars have been correct that communication process is important at the secondary level, but have failed as change agents to convince prospective teachers, administrators, practicing teachers that study of process is important; or 3) there really is study of process occurring within the form of performance skill objectives. The evidence from Table I in this paper suggests there is no evidence of any possibility of the third conclusion being the case. There is too much evidence from communication scholars regarding the way in which humans interact, creating, and sharing meanings to consider the first conclusion to be valid. It seems most likely that the second conclusion is the most likely valid of all three possible conclusions. Therefore, an implication of this paper is to challenge educators in the communication discipline who are concerned about curriculum to renew their efforts as change agents. Efforts by SCA, and several states to formulate appropriate competency objectives is certainly a step in the right direction. Efforts to link communication competency goals to federal and state support for basics in elementary education is a positive step toward

implimentation of change. But, the evidence is quite clear that renewed efforts must be made to "sell" the secondary school speech teacher on the necessity for and the ways to focus instruction on process and skill development rather than just skill development.

TABLE I
CURRICULAR LOCATION FOR OBJECTIVES

Competency Item	Location Large School		Location Small School		Location Total	
	Course	Percent	Course	Percent	Course	Percent
1	I	86.7	I	81.3	I	83.9
2	I	100.0	I	75.0	I	87.1
3	I	86.7	I	82.4	I	84.4
4	I	66.7	I	70.6	I	68.8
5*	I	66.7	A	52.9; I = 41.2	I	53.1
6	I	53.3; A = 26.7	I	58.8; A = 35.3	I	56.3
7	I	60.0	I	52.9	I	56.3
8*	I	60.0	I	41.2; A = 41.2	I	50.0
9	I	93.3	I	70.6	I	81.3
10	I	93.3	I	81.3	I	87.1
11	I	100.0	I	93.8	I	96.8
12*	I	80.0	A	47.1; I = 41.2	I	59.4
13*	I	66.7	A	64.7	I	50.0
14*	I	46.7	A	76.5	A	46.9
15	I	93.3	I	87.5	I	90.3
16	I	86.7	I	75.0	I	80.6
17	I	86.7	I	62.5	I	74.2
18*	I	46.7; N = 40.0	A	58.8; N = 29.4	A	37.4
19	I	66.7	I	68.8	I	67.7
20*	I	86.7	I	43.8; A = 43.8	I	64.5
21*	N	53.3; I = 40.0	A	52.9	N	40.6
22*	I	53.3; N = 46.7	I	47.1; A = 47.1	I	50.0
23	I	100.0	I	87.5	I	93.5
24*	I	60.0	A	50.0; I = 43.8	I	51.6
25	I	60.0	I	68.8	I	64.5
26*	I	80.0	A	56.3; I = 43.8	I	61.3
27	I	73.3	I	62.5	I	67.7
28	I	80.0	I	56.3	I	67.7
29	I	93.3	I	81.3	I	87.1
30	I	86.7	I	64.7	I	75.0
31	I	100.0	I	100.0	I	100.0
32	I	100.0	I	100.0	I	100.0
33*	I	73.3	I	58.8; A = 41.2	I	65.6
34	I	80.0	I	75.0	I	77.4
35*	I	46.7; N = 33.3	I	41.2; A = 41.2	I	43.8
36	I	73.3	I	64.7	I	68.8
37*	I	46.7; N = 40.0	A	58.8; I = 35.3	I	40.6
38*	I	60.0	A	68.8	A	41.9
39*	N	53.3; I = 40.0	A	58.8	N	37.5
40*	N	60.0	I	43.8; A = 43.8	N	35.5; I = 35.5

Key: I = Introductory course, A = Advanced speech, N = None

TABLE 1 (continued)

NOTES:

1. *Difference on 17 competency items.
2. For 22 items, both school size categories use I as location for attention.
3. Of 21 where two categories different, 8 small schools use multiple locations when large schools use single location; 7 both single, 4 both multiple; 2 large school multiple when small single.
4. In all large schools I or N location of attention.
5. In eleven small schools A location of attention.

TABLE 2
RANK ORDER IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCY ITEMS

Item	All Schools Mean	Rank Order	Large Mean	School R. Order	Small Mean	School R. Order
1	4.375	15	4.412	23	4.333	14
2	4.500	13	4.588	17	4.400	12
3	4.062	19	4.529	19	3.533	23
4	3.562	31	3.353	38	3.800	19
5	3.656	29	3.882	27	3.400	27
6	3.687	27	3.882	27	3.467	26
7	3.812	26	3.824	30	3.800	13
8	3.344	36	3.882	27	2.733	36
9	4.375	15	4.471	22	4.267	15
10	5.344	6	5.059	6	5.667	3
11	6.000	1	6.118	1	5.867	2
12	3.875	24	3.706	34	4.067	16
13	4.531	12	5.000	8	4.000	17
14	4.000	21	4.882	10	3.000	33
15	4.750	8	4.882	10	4.600	9
16	5.469	5	5.529	4	5.400	4
17	4.750	8	4.941	9	4.533	11
18	2.844	39	2.941	39	2.733	36
19	3.969	23	4.647	14	3.200	30
20	3.469	34	3.824	30	3.067	31
21	2.469	40	2.941	39	1.933	40
22	3.844	25	4.647	14	2.933	34
23	5.500	4	5.588	3	5.400	4
24	3.687	27	3.824	30	3.533	23
25	4.062	19	4.706	12	3.333	28
26	4.687	10	4.529	19	4.867	8
27	4.500	13	5.588	17	4.400	12
28	4.000	21	4.176	25	3.800	19
29	4.281	17	4.706	12	3.800	19
30	4.281	17	4.529	19	4.000	17
31	5.687	3	5.941	2	5.400	4
32	5.937	2	5.529	4	6.400	1
33	5.000	7	5.059	6	4.933	7
34	4.625	11	4.674	14	4.600	9
35	3.219	37	3.588	35	2.800	35
36	3.531	32	3.529	37	3.533	23
37	3.531	32	3.941	26	3.067	31
38	3.594	30	3.824	30	3.333	28
39	3.000	38	3.588	35	2.333	39
40	3.375	35	4.235	24	2.400	38

TABLE 2 (continued)

TOP 10 COMPETENCY QUESTIONS

11	6.000	State ideas clearly to audiences
32	5.937	Maintain eye contact
31	5.687	Speak clearly and audibly
23	5.500	Use variety in information sources
16	5.469	Use evidence and support
10	5.344	Use notes effectively when speaking
33	5.000	Function well in various performance formats
17	4.750	Adapt topics to differing audiences
15	4.750	Expand or limit topics to meet needs
26	4.687	Identify organizational patterns

All ten are public speaking objectives (all except 13 and 2)

TABLE 3

MOST FREQUENTLY USED INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD

Competency Item	Large School					Small School				
	L%	P%	D%	R%	NA%	L%	P%	D%	R%	NA%
1		46.7	40.0				70.6			
2*		66.7					47.1	47.1		
3			53.3					58.8		
4		33.3		33.3			41.2		29.4	
5*	28.6	21.9	28.6			47.1				
6		33.3	40.0				35.3	41.2		
7		46.7					47.1			
8		40.0	26.7				35.3	35.3		
9*	35.7	28.6	28.6			58.8				
10		93.3					76.5			
11		73.3					82.4			
12	40.0		33.3			47.1		29.4		
13		46.7					62.5			
14*	26.7		20.0		40.0		52.9			
15*	40.0	40.0					47.1			
16		73.3					88.2			
17		46.7					70.6			
18*		33.3			46.7		58.8			35.3
19*	26.7		26.7		26.7		52.9			
20	40.0	20.0	33.3			29.4	29.4	23.5		
21*					60.0		52.9			
22*		33.3			46.7		58.8			
23		73.3					70.6			
24		46.7					64.7			
25*		33.3	26.7		26.7		70.6			
26*	53.3						52.9			
27		53.3					58.8			
28*	33.3	26.7	33.3				41.2	35.3		
29*	33.3	53.3					70.6			
30		53.3					70.6			
31		93.3					76.5			
32		86.7					82.4			
33		71.4					82.4			
34		53.3					58.8			
35	21.4	21.6	28.6		28.6	17.6	29.4	23.5		23.5
36*			46.7				35.3	35.3		
37*		28.6			35.7	23.5	35.3	29.4		38*
38*	35.7					29.4	23.5			35.3
39*					50.0	23.5		35.3		29.4
40*					57.1			41.2		

Key: L=Lecture, P=Performance Activity, D=Discussion, R=Role Playing, NA=Not Applicable

TABLE 3 (continued)

NOTES:

1. Difference on 19 competency items.
2. For 20 items both categories of size use performance as the primary instructional method.
3. Of 19 where 2 categories different: 9 large schools use multiple methods where small school single; 5 small schools use multiple methods where large school single; 3 where both size schools use multiple methods; 2 where both size schools use single method.

TABLE 4
MOST FREQUENTLY USED EVALUATION METHOD

Competency Item	Large School				Small School				
	PG%	OB%	N%	T%	PG%	OB%	N%	T%	O%
1		60.0				52.9			
2	33.3	60.0			41.2	29.4			
3		40.0				47.1			
4	66.7				47.1				
5*		33.3	33.3	26.7	29.4	29.4		23.5	
6	33.3				47.1				
7*	40.0	33.3			52.9				
8*	33.3		40.0		41.2				
9*	33.3		33.3		35.3			35.3	
10	86.7				82.4				
11	66.7				88.2				
12*		33.3	20.0	20.0		17.6	23.5	41.2	
13	33.3				47.1				
14*			40.0		41.2			29.4	
15	60.0				64.7				
16	80.0				88.2				
17	60.0				82.4				
18*	33.3		46.7		52.9		35.3		
19*	26.7	33.3	33.3		29.4	41.2			
20*		33.3	33.3		35.2		23.5		
21*			66.7		58.8				
22*			53.3		76.5				
23	73.3				70.6				
24*	46.7	26.7	26.7		76.5				
25*	33.3		26.7		64.7				
26*	40.0			40.0	70.6				
27	66.7				70.6				
28*		46.7			52.9				
29	46.7				76.5				
30*	40.0	33.3	26.7		58.8				
31	86.7				94.1				
32	86.7				88.2				
33	73.3				82.4				
34*	53.3	33.3			52.9				
35*	33.3	26.7	33.3		35.3	23.5			
36*	40.0	40.0			23.5	23.5	17.6		17.6
37*	26.7	26.7	40.0		35.3		17.6		
38*		46.7	26.7		47.1		29.4		
39	26.7		53.3		23.5		35.3		
40*			60.0		29.4	23.5	29.4		

Key: T=Test; PG=Performance Grade; C=Contract; OB=Observation; P=Peer; O=Other; N=None.

TABLE 4 (continued)

NOTES:

1. Differences on 22 competency items.
2. For 15 items both categories of school size use PG as primary evaluation.
3. Of 22 items where the evaluation was different by school size, the difference is as follows: 11 items where both sizes used multiple method but the methods were different; 7 items where large schools used multiple methods and small schools used single methods; 3 items where both sizes used a single method but the methods differed; 1 item where the small schools used multiple methods and the large schools used a single method.

ENDNOTES

¹For a summary of research in California, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin, see Cassandra Book and Edward J. Pappas, "The Status of Speech Communication in Secondary Schools in the United States: An Update," Communication Education, 30 (July, 1981), 199-208. For the state of Illinois, see unpublished studies by Steven Jacobs, "Survey of the Status of Speech/Drama Education in the Secondary Schools of the State of Illinois: 1973-74," August, 1976 and Leslie Wilson, "A Survey of Speech Competency in the Secondary Schools of Illinois," 1975.

²Cassandra Book and Edward J. Pappas, "The Status of Speech Communication in Secondary Schools in the United States: An Update," Communication Education, 30 (July, 1981) 199-208.

³Ibid.

⁴Robert Ince and Earl Davis, "The States of Secondary Speech in Illinois: A Survey," Springfield, Illinois: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1967.

⁵George Tuttle, "A Field Based Model For Determining Adult Communication Behavior," Communication Education, 33 (July, 1984).